

VZCZCXRO7786
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #2071/01 2730952
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 300952Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5319
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002071

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/30/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON FATAL IED ATTACK ON U.S. AND PHILIPPINE
TROOPS ON JOLO

REF: A. MANILA 2055 (TWO U.S. SERVICEMEN KILLED)
[1](#)B. MANILA 2057 (CORE EAC)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: While the picture is far from complete, additional information is now available regarding the September 29 roadside attack on a U.S.-Philippine convoy in Jolo that resulted in the deaths of two U.S. and one Philippine servicemen (Ref A). It is not yet known whether U.S. troops were the primary target of the attack. U.S. law enforcement agencies have launched an investigation. U.S. troops are stepping up force protection as a precaution against copycat attacks. We see no new threat to Embassy facilities in Manila at this time. A ceremony for the deceased U.S. servicemen will be held later this week, and the Embassy's flag is at half-staff. The Embassy has received several condolences from the Philippine Government. END SUMMARY.

Background

[1](#)2. (C) The servicemen were engaged in one of many joint U.S.-Philippine Civil Military Operation (CMO) projects being conducted by Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P). To date in 2009, 11 CMO projects have been completed on Jolo Island alone -- focused on roads, schools, and water wells -- with a budget of approximately US\$1.7 million. Over the past several months, there has been a rise in IED attacks on Jolo, averaging one per week. These attacks markedly increased following several recent AFP combat operations against terrorist and insurgent groups. U.S. troops do not engage in combat in the Philippines, and since the deployment of U.S. Special Forces seven years ago the single previous American fatality resulted from a bombing in Zamboanga in 2002.

September 29 Attack

[1](#)3. (C) The September 29 attack took place on a road just outside a CMO school project in the village of Kagay. A convoy of two vehicles, both U.S. up-armored Humvees carrying U.S. and Philippine troops, was moving supplies from the CMO site to an AFP Marine camp a half-mile away. The blast, which hit the first vehicle, appears to have been significantly larger than previous IED attacks, completely destroying the armored Humvee. Currently available information indicates that the crater left by the blast was three meters deep and nine meters wide.

Law Enforcement Investigation

[1](#)4. (C) FBI, Diplomatic Security, and Naval Criminal Investigative Service personnel will conduct witness

interviews at Camp Bautista in Jolo, but they are not yet able to access to the attack site due to security concerns (the AFP has temporarily withdrawn the troops it had in the vicinity). Philippine officials, some of whom have received U.S. training in bombing investigations, are likely to deploy to the attack site. In the next several days, U.S. intelligence agencies hope to have additional information on possible perpetrators of the attack. The Country Team is exchanging information and coordinating efforts.

Additional Embassy Actions and Condolences

15. (C) While it is not yet known whether U.S. troops were the primary target of the attack, JSOTF-P personnel are stepping up force protection as a precaution against copycat attacks. We see no new threat to Embassy facilities in Manila at this time, nor do we see any evidence increased threat to Mindanao or the Sulu Archipelago. A ceremony for the deceased U.S. servicemen will be held later this week at JSOTF-P's headquarters in Zamboanga. The Embassy has received several expressions of condolence from the Philippine Government. Sen. Richard Gordon, who is also Chairman of the Philippine Red Cross, offered his condolences publicly at a disaster relief event in which the Ambassador participated on the morning of September 30; Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Gaa is writing to the families of the deceased servicemen; and Foreign Minister Romulo plans to issue a statement upon his return to the Philippines on the evening of September 30.

Comment

MANILA 00002071 002 OF 002

16. (C) The ramifications of the September 29 attack are still emerging. Attacks employing less powerful IEDs have been common in the southern Philippines; on September 29 alone there were four other reported bombings on Jolo. We expected an increase in terrorist activity targeting the AFP in the post-Ramadan period, and both JSOTF-P and the AFP were monitoring the situation closely.

KENNEY